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From the Hill

William Proxmire

I am awarding my Golden Fleece of the Month for September to the 190 federal officials who have been coddled and pampered at the expense of American taxpayers to the tune of \$3.4 million by being provided with door-to-door chauffeur service. This is an increase of 15 officials, or 8 percent more than the results of my Carter administration survey in 1979.

Three agencies deserve special mention for their use of chauffeur service:

- the Department of Defense as the worst offender (with 60 officials eligible for chauffeur service);
- the Department of Housing and Urban Development for maintaining the most expensive

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automobile of any cabinet member (at an annual cost of \$9,588, Secretary Pierce's car weighs in at twice the average cost);

- and the Central Intelligence Agency for most overtime for a chauffeur (while the director's chauffeur received a salary of \$20,000, which is near the average, his overtime pay was whopping \$26,000 for a total of \$46,000).

The Fleece of the Month is awarded for the biggest, most wasteful or ironic use of taxpayers' funds for the month. In the last two months, I have conducted a survey of all major governmental agencies and departments to determine the extent of chauffeur service.

Only a handful of federal officials are specifically given the authority under law to enjoy home-to-work chauffeuring, but my survey of federal agencies demonstrates that the lack of legal authority has not stopped scores of federal officials from hopping into the backseat.

Title 31, Section 638(a) of the U.S. Code restricts the use of government automobiles to "official purposes" only and "official purposes" does not include door-to-door chauffeur service to and from home. The only exceptions provided in the law are for the president, the secretary of a department (not undersecretaries or assistant secretaries), a doctor on out-patient duty, individuals in field service and our diplomatic personnel abroad.

In addition to Title 31, Section 638(a), the Congress has provided statutory authority for chauffeur service for its leadership through appropriations bills.

Sen. William Proxmire is a Democrat from Wisconsin.

My survey shows that despite a 1979 ruling by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel interpreting the law very strictly, bureaucrats fall all over themselves attempting to justify this unwarranted luxury.

Their excuses are legendary! Here are just a few:

Excuse Number One. A chauffeured automobile enables me to conserve my valuable time and be more productive.

Excuse Number Two. I must often attend early morning and late night meetings and public transit is often unavailable.

Excuse Number Three. Our offices are in a high crime precinct.

Excuse Number Four. My use of a chauffeured automobile is in the government's interest.

The only interest being served here is the personal convenience and desire for status of the federal official. There is no government interest.

In reviewing all of these excuses in 1979, the Justice Department Office of Legal Counsel in an opinion just now made public, found that they were all invalid! The Justice Department concluded that: "Nothing in (the law's) text, background or prior interpretation supports a reading so contrary to its plain meaning."

The Justice Department even had a few practical suggestions for the poor, overworked bureaucrat needing chauffeur service:

"A senior official may lengthen his or her working day, if necessary, by coming earlier, leaving later and living closer to the office. Using government transportation instead is a matter of personal convenience."

At an average annual cost of \$32,000 for this personal convenience, the American taxpayers are being billed enough to provide these bureaucrats with over 5,000 roundtrip rides in a taxicab from Capitol Hill to Georgetown each and every year.

That is why I offered an amendment — which the Senate Appropriations Committee accepted — to the Treasury, Postal Service & General Government Appropriations Bill to reinforce existing law by denying funds for home-to-work transportation, except in rare emergencies, for any official not specifically exempted from the law. It also requires the Office of Management and Budget to report to the Appropriations Committee quarterly justifying any exceptions which are made.

If enacted, this legislation will go a long way to cutting down the abuses by high administration officials. No longer will they be able to spend time in their chauffeured cars figuring out how to cut school milk programs, or reducing retirement benefits for social security recipients, or slashing other programs while wasting thousands of dollars themselves in tax funds.

Let them ride the bus to work to study how effective our transportation system is, or run to work to consider the value of federal health programs, or car pool to save on energy consumption as they urge everyone else to do.